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NOTES AND COMMENTS.

I.

QUEER WORDS.

IN Mr. Day's remarks in last month's REVIEW he treats "brottus" as a word peculiar to the city of Savannah, Georgia. In the island of Jamaica the negroes use almost the same word in exactly the same sense. If a negro buys half a dozen bananas he commonly demands one more "*for brata*," —*i. e.* (to use the old English phrase), "*to boot*." The "a" in *brata* has the full, broad Italian sound, as in "malo" or "baccio." I think we need hardly go so far as the African dialects to find an origin for this word. *Piccaninny*, a common West Indian negro word, is evidently from the Portuguese *Pequeninho*—little one, and *fetish* is traced to *feiticheira*, the Portuguese for "hocus-pocus." It seems probable that *brata* is a corruption of the Portuguese (and Spanish) *barato*—cheap. The Portuguese, having been the first European people to open intercourse with the negro races, may reasonably be supposed to have left these traces of their influence on the first essays of the negroes to speak the various languages of the whites.

EWAN MACPHERSON.

II.

PERSONNEL OF THE STAGE.

IT is an accepted scientific truth that motion, not rest, is the normal condition of all matter throughout the universe. This truth seems to carry with it, as a necessary corollary, the additional fact that all motion is progressive. This law, and all that is dependent upon it, governs the world of ethics also. There is, whether in matter or morals, no recession; what appears such is illusive merely, as in the case at certain times of the apparent motions of some of the heavenly bodies. The world we live upon—the men and women we live among—are progressing toward a higher and nobler plane. We are growing better, notwithstanding the discouraging views of pessimism. A clever phrase-maker has spoken of "the fierce white light that beats upon the throne," but such illumination is not comparable to the penetrating interest and searching curiosity with which the public eye regards the actor; and it is a peculiarity of this interest and curiosity that it delights more in magnifying the faults and blemishes of unwise or unfortunate individuals than in noting the merits and virtues of the mass of the profession.

The old English statute which placed upon actors the stigma of vagabondage found an echo in the enactments of many a council-board and in the warnings

of many pulpits in Puritan New England. But gradually, as preachers and law-makers became wiser, the stigma of vagabondage has been left so far behind in our onward movement, as to seem bigoted and cruel, and as degrading to the men who perpetrated that outrage upon an honest and honorable vocation, as was the infliction of torture and death by courts and inquisition, upon those who were so far in advance of the ignorance of their times as to incur the enmity of intolerance, whether in the field of science, as Galileo, or in religion, as Spinoza and the martyrs. Standing, as we do, in the bright and strengthening light of broader and more catholic views, we may now regard such enactments and the spirit of the times that made them possible, as landmarks that show, as we look back over the dark valley that man has traversed, how much further and higher we have progressed.

With the awakening of more charitable judgment, this once branded class have also advanced with us, until they now challenge our respect for their uprightness of character and our admiration for the brilliancy with which they reflect some of the highest and noblest qualities of humanity. As a class, their lives are as clean (perhaps cleaner), as honorable (perhaps more honorable), as worthy of all commendation and emulation, as any other. It is a fact that they figure less often as offenders against the laws than any other class of like numbers. It is their pride and boast that none of their calling have ever been convicted of a felony. And their numbers are greater, perhaps, than most of my readers may imagine. It is estimated that there are in the United States about five thousand persons pursuing the vocation of actors of plays—one-third of the number being women. The average dramatic company comprises this proportion of the sexes—two-thirds men, one-third women. This calculation does not include the large number of quasi-actors belonging to the minstrel and variety branches of the great “show” business; nor does it include circus people; nor the large army of theatrical employés of various kinds not seen by the public upon the stage, outnumbering the actual acting people. It comprises only actors proper, who represent the dramatis personæ of plays.

As in all classes and all vocations, there are “black sheep” to be found among our friends of the stage; but, as a whole, the personnel of the dramatic profession among us to-day is highly creditable to the influences of their art, and protests loudly and eloquently against the idea that such influence is detrimental to purity and elevation of character, correct principles and blameless lives. But I go further: I claim that its influence is unqualifiedly beneficial and ennobling.

E. M. DAY.

III.

MODERN GLASS HOUSES.

IN law a man's own hearthstone is assumed to be his citadel. In all the rights and equities of the natural man, the privacy of his personal and family life stands foremost. Yet there is no right more continually and recklessly violated, more deliberately assailed, and less adequately protected. It is at the mercy of a great power, which is tireless in its inquisition and without scruple in its use of instruments. The public press as a tyrannic force for good and evil, both in social and political matters, is without peer. Journalism is organized curiosity. Its business in part is to drag secret and unknown things into the glare of sunlight. It assumes the right to decide whether such enlightenment is for the public benefit. Yet there are few cases known where irresponsible power, working under the pretence of the public good, hesitates to subserve personal gain or ambition. The very possession of great power is a fatal temptation to its